

Mindfulness of Breathing (2)

by Thich Nhat Hanh

Dharma Talk given on July 26, 1998 in Plum Village, France.

(Three bells)

Dear Sangha, today is the 26th of July, 1998. We are in the Lower Hamlet, during the Summer Retreat. All of us can live for seventy, eighty or ninety years, or if we do very well, for one hundred years. As far as little children are concerned, one year is a long time, maybe like a hundred years, but as far as adults are concerned, one year is not very long. As soon as we've had the New Year, and rest a little bit, then there's another New Year come along. So one year isn't very long to the adults. But the children have to wait a long, long time after New Year's ceremony until the next New Year's ceremony. Now what I'm going to tell you happened one thousand five hundred years ago.

In China, in a temple, there were more than a hundred monks practicing together; and among them there was one Indian monk, and that monk was sick. He wasn't able to go to get water to wash his face, or to bathe on his own. The other monks had to help him. His name was *Kaniska*. Poor, poor monk—he could not walk, and therefore the other monks had to get water and bring it to him so that he could wash, and they had to change his clothes for him. There were many monks who wanted to help him, but no one was able to help him for very long. In the temple there was a young man of about twenty years old. He was a very good monk, and when the other monks had given up on helping the sick monk, he continued to wash clothes, to wash the monk himself, and to wipe the body of the Indian monk. Five years passed like that, and the young monk did not ever lose his will to do this work.

One day the Indian monk said, "You don't have to worry about me any more; I'm about to leave." The young monk said, "Where are you going? Like this, you can't go anywhere. Stay here with us so I can look after you, because I am young. I am only twenty-five years old." The other monk was sixty or seventy years old. That young monk was a very lovable monk. He really had a future, and he said, "I think I have good energy, and I can help you." The old monk suddenly stood up and started to walk. The young monk was very surprised, because up till then he hadn't been able to do anything for himself; he couldn't even put on his own clothes. The name of the young monk was Tri Huyen. His name meant that he was able to know wonderful things. He saw that he was soon going to say goodbye to the old monk. He had been looking after him for a long time, and had grown very close to him. "I know that when you go, I will miss you, and we won't know when we're going to meet again. After we say goodbye today, we may never see each other again." And the Indian monk said, "I think we will meet again at least once more. There is something I want to tell you."

"You are still young, you are a very good monk, and you are very intelligent. You will give very good Dharma talks in the future, and you will realize your practice in a wonderful way. Many people will respect you, and in this country everyone will hear about you; therefore, maybe four or five years from now, you will be famous. So you must take great care, because fame is very dangerous for the person who is famous. As far as I can see into the future, you will have a very dangerous accident, and it will make you suffer a great deal. At that time, nobody will be helping you, so try to find me. I will help you at that time, because you have already expressed your love and your compassion by looking after me for five years. When in the future you have a misfortune, an accident, remember to come and look for me, and I will be able to help you."

The monk Tri Huyen thought: "This monk is just guessing. I think I'll be lucky, I won't have an accident. But he still wanted to know where that Indian monk would go, so that if in fact he had the opportunity in the future, he could go and visit him. So he said, "Please, Thay, tell me, in case I have a misfortune or accident, tell me your address so I can come and find you." And he said, "My country is called Thuc, and the mountain where I'll be staying is called Cuu Lung. If you go to this country called Thuc, and you come to the mountain called Cuu Lung, you will see two pine trees, very high, growing up into the blue sky. If you climb up the mountain and you see these two pine trees, then you will meet me. It is certain that we will meet each other one more time." Then the Indian monk took up his bag, and off he went.

Just as the Indian monk had said, Tri Huyen did very well in his studies, and he was very much admired. Every thing happened wonderfully. He became a Dharma teacher, and he began to open classes to teach the Buddha Dharma to people in the country. Many people came to study with him, and they learned not only from his knowledge. Within

people in the country. Many people came to study with him, and they learned, not only from his knowledge. Within a year he became very famous. King Y Tong, who was the king at that time, heard about him, and made a decree inviting him to come to the capital and teach the Dharma. Everyone in the temple was very happy, because they thought, "Oh, we have a very good monk in the temple—he's been invited by the king to the capital." So all the monks in the temple wished him good luck when he went to the capital. He was very successful, and the king, the queen and all the mandarins admired him very much. He taught the sutras very well, he taught the commentaries very well, and the king knelt before him and asked to become a disciple of his by receiving the Three Refuges. The king offered him a special Sanghati robe, purple in color. Only one person in the whole country had a purple robe, and that was the king's teacher, who was called the National Teacher. The king gave him a new name. Before he was called Tri Huyen, "wonderful knowledge," and now he was called Ngo Dat, "he who has awakened to the way", or someone who has become enlightened. Everybody in the country heard that the king had become a disciple of this monk, and this king had taken the three refuges with this monk.

The king decided to ask the most intelligent Buddhists in the country to come to the capital, and over three thousand people were invited to represent everyone in the country, and to listen to the teachings on the *Lotus Sutra* given by the monk, for a period of three months. Among those people who came to hear him were very high monks, very high nuns, and very good lay people who had been chosen to come to the capital to hear these teachings on the Lotus Sutra. He gave very good teachings, and the king did not miss a single teaching; he came every day, and he was always present, listening from beginning to end. On the day of the final teaching on the Lotus Sutra, the king made a special dais for the monk to sit on. It was made of sandalwood. It was very large, three hundred meters, so that the monk could sit on that dais to give the last Dharma talk on the Lotus Sutra. The king said that after the monk had given the teaching, he would stand up and touch the earth three times to the monk, along with everyone else who was there.

There were three sounds of the bell, and the monk, wearing his purple robe, climbed onto the dais of sandalwood. At the sound of the bell, everyone sat down, and the National Teacher sat down to begin to teach his final teaching on the Lotus Sutra. Looking down, he saw the king kneeling, and all the lay people also kneeling. Quite naturally, this monk had a feeling in his heart that he was very important, and that feeling of pride appeared in his heart. He was not following his breathing as he sat on his Dharma throne, and that is why he had the feeling, "I am so important, I am Number One in the land, I am so famous, the king sees that I am unequalled by anyone," arose in him. With the arising of this feeling, he knew that he had been overcome by a wrong view, wrong thinking, and therefore, he immediately returned to his breathing, and breathed mindfully, but it was a little bit too late. Pride had already been born in his heart.

Only a brief second passed before he returned to his breathing, but it was too late. He saw that there was something very small floating in the air in front of him, small as a grain of dust, and it was coming very fast towards him. It fell down onto his knee, and it was as painful as if somebody had stabbed a knife into his knee, and he shouted out "Good Heavens!" The king jumped, and everybody wondered what accident had happened to the monk. They came up to him, and he was holding his knee and crying out in pain. The king called the best doctors in the land to come to heal him, but they couldn't find anything in his knee. Still, he called out in pain for a long time. He couldn't teach any more—he couldn't teach even one line of the sutra. They had to ask the soldiers of the king to take him down

from the dais, and back to the temple to rest. Therefore the final Dharma talk was a great failure. Everybody thought that he had been bitten by some insect, or some animal, and that is why he couldn't continue the teachings, and so they all went home.

That night, the place on his knee swelled up as big as a huge grapefruit, and he couldn't sleep the whole night. During the following days it turned into a big abscess, and he couldn't bear the pain. Poor monk! The king loved him very much, and he gave a decree that all the best doctors in the land should come and look after the monk, but when none of them could find out what was wrong, they all felt defeated. It went on like this for month after month, and the abscess would not get better. Every time that the monk looked at this abscess, he saw that it looked like a person's face. It looked as if it had two eyes on it, and it was as big as a grapefruit. Every time he looked at it and saw these two eyes looking up at him, he was very afraid. I don't know if doctors of today would know what this sickness was, but the doctors of that time were defeated, they couldn't find out what it was.

When the monk was in pain like that for six months, he couldn't do anything. He couldn't teach, he couldn't lead retreats. Every day and every night he had to sit up in pain, and he got thinner and thinner, and none of the medicines would make him better. One night he thought, "I'm useless. I can't do anything to benefit the king, to benefit the land, and all these people are here looking after me...I am not worthy of it." So that night, he was determined, he would leave the temple, he would leave the capital without letting anybody know. He wouldn't let the king know, he wouldn't let the mandarins know, or let anybody know. The monk put on his ordinary monk's robe, and because of the great pain he had to take a cane in his hand to help him walk, and he went at midnight, very slowly because of all the pain.

He walked all night, and by the next morning he had left the capital, and he came into the countryside and looked in the lake. He saw his face in the lake, and he was afraid that people would recognize him, so he lifted up his robe and covered his face so that no one would see that he was the monk of the king. He asked people the way to the land of

Thuc, to find the mountain called Cuu Lung, so he could find that Indian monk that he had known in the past. That monk, called Kaniska, had said that if he were ever to have a terrible accident, he should come to the mountain in the land of Thuc, go up the mountain, and when he saw the two pine trees, then he would meet Kaniska. The monk asked, "What is the way to Thuc?"

He went over the bridge, and saw that somebody had left a bamboo stick behind. He threw away the old stick that the monks had given him, to take the new bamboo cane he had found, and the old stick was swept out to the sea. He came to a place where people were selling food, rice and sweet potatoes, and somebody made an offering to him of some sweet rice, but he said he wouldn't eat it because he said it was not good for abscesses. Then the old lady offered him sweet potato, but he said that was no good either. Finally the old lady offered him some banana, and he ate that, and he had enough strength to stand up and walk. He took his cane and went in search of the land called Thuc.

He walked, day after day, month after month, because this land was very far away. Many nights he had to sleep under a tree. Sometimes he went across the land of a temple, and he stopped in the temple and asked to be able to sleep in the temple, and the monks and nuns invited him into the temple to sleep in the monks' quarters, but he wouldn't allow it, he said he would just sleep outside in the courtyard. That went on for many months, until he found the mountain call Cuu Lung. He was so tired and so hungry, and his robes smelled very bad, not only because he had not washed them for five or six months, but also because the pus from the abscess had run into the robes. It must have been many bowls full of pus that had come out of the abscess, and he didn't have any cotton to wipe it clean, so it just stuck to his robes, and they had turned a horrible color, not brown anymore. Nobody who looked at him could believe that he had been a National Teacher. So he had had a great accident; it was also a psychological accident, because he had seen that he was no longer worthy of anybody's trust.

That afternoon he came to the mountain and looked up, and he saw two pine trees imprinted in the mist, very high, surrounded by clouds and mist. He put all his effort into climbing that mountain, every drop of strength that he had left. When he had gone a third of the way up the mountain, behind the two pines he saw the roof of a very beautiful temple. He was very happy, and he made a little more effort. He climbed for another half an hour, and he came to

the temple. A very kind novice monk came out, and he asked, "Is this the place where the Venerable Kaniska lives?" and the novice said "Yes. Please come in," and the novice led him.

He sat in the guest room waiting in order to present his greetings to the abbot Kaniska. He waited five minutes, and then Master Kaniska opened the door and came in. he tried to stand up and bow to the Indian monk, because the Indian monk looked beautiful, like a bodhisattva. He didn't look as he used to look. His face was lit up by light, and he was wearing a robe, looking like a bodhisattva, very mindful, very serene. The monk wanted to touch the earth in front of him, but Master Kaniska wouldn't let him. He said, "You are my brother, you need not touch the earth in front of me. Sit down and tell me about what has happened during the last year." Then the novice brought both of them a cup of tea. I don't know what kind of tea it was, but when the monk drank the tea, he felt so well, extraordinarily well. It wasn't lotus tea, it wasn't jasmine tea, but when he drank it he felt so well. During the last six months he hadn't felt that well. He had suffered, had met so many difficulties, had been hungry and thirsty, and after all those difficulties he drank a cup of tea and he felt so well, as if he was drinking the nectar of compassion of the Bodhisattva.

The Master Kaniska asked, "After I left, what happened? Please tell me." They sat together and talked, and the monk started to cry like a child, because he had not been able to cry for so long, and he had suffered so much. He had not dared to complain to anybody, and now, when he met his old friend, he cried like a child. Master Kaniska allowed him to cry for a while, so he'd feel better, and then he said, "Right, tell me about your pain and suffering. What ever you have suffered, we will surely be able to put it right." Then the monk started to tell what had happened: all his success, the accident which had happened, and the suffering he had been through, how he had left the capital in the middle of the night, how he had suffered on the journey, how he had been hungry and thirsty—he told Master Kaniska everything. When he had finished telling, he stopped crying, and then Master Kaniska put his hand on the monk's shoulder, and said, "Now, will you let me look at the abscess, which you said is as big as a grapefruit, and every time you look at it, you see two eyes in it looking up at you in a terrible way? Show me." Then the monk bent down and lifted up his robe, and the eyes in the abscess looked at Master Kaniska, but the Master smiled back. He said, "Don't worry, I can help you cure this abscess. Down at the bottom of the mountain there is a stream called the Resolution of Resentment Stream, and it can wash away all of the impurities. If we wash the abscess three times in that water it will be healed. Now, tonight, it is too late, as you have to sleep here first. I ask your permission, because in the past you wiped me, you washed me, you changed my clothes for five years, now let me look after you. And the young monk said, "No, you are forty years older than I am, you are a much more experienced and higher monk than I am. I will not allow you to do this." But Master Kaniska was determined, and so the younger monk had to agree.

The old monk began to help him to take off his robe, and to take off his trousers, because without taking off the trousers he couldn't bathe the abscess. He prepared a very clean cloth, and warm water with salt in it, and he bathed the monk with this water. He wiped the monk until he was dry, and he had to change the water four times before he could clean the body of the young monk, who had smelled so bad when he arrived. Now he had been bathed in

could clean the body of the young monk, who had stunk so bad when he arrived. Now he had been bathed in salted water, and his body no longer smelled—it was very fragrant. Then, Master Kaniska took a clean pair of trousers, very light and very fragrant, and helped the young monk to put them on. Then he went to the kitchen, and he brought him some rice soup, and he said, "Please eat this rice soup. When you have finished it, I will take you to a room where you can sleep, and have a good night's sleep. Tomorrow, when there is light, I will come to you in your room, and together we will go down to the Resolution of Resentment River, and we will be able to wash and cure your abscess."

After eating the rice soup, he felt so much better, and he followed Master Kaniska to the room where he was going to sleep. It was a very simple room with a wooden bed, and there was a thin mattress, there was a sheet, and it was very clean and fragrant. After saying goodnight, the abbot Kaniska left, saying, "Tomorrow we will meet early in the morning." The monk was very happy, because he thought, "Maybe Master Kaniska can heal my abscess." He felt very much at ease when he lay down on his bed, because he had a lot of faith. But at midnight the pain was terrible, it was so much worse than it had ever been that he thought, "I cannot bear it until tomorrow morning to go down, I have to go down on my own." So he opened the door very quietly and went out of his room, and he did his best to find his way down the mountain.

Now, to find your way down a mountain in the middle of the night, when it's completely dark, is very difficult. But the pain was so great, that he felt he needed to do this. Finally he heard the noise of the stream at the foot of the mountain, and he went towards the sound of the stream, and he found the stream. There wasn't much light, there was a little light from the stars, and he saw the face of the water glistening, and he knew that was the stream. He pulled up his robe, and he sat very stably and he went to put his hands into the water, but he hadn't yet scooped the water up yet. The abscess shouted out to him, "Don't do that, don't do that!" I don't know whether it was really the abscess shouting, or whether the sound came up from his own heart: "Don't do that, don't do that! Stop! Stop!" It was as though there was somebody shouting, and he threw back the water. He waited.

The voice said to him, "Wait! Wait! You are a very good student of the Buddha. You know all about the history of China. Have you ever read the book called Tai Hang?" The monk said, "Yes, I have read that book." The voice said, "If you have read that book, do you know the story about what happened between Vien An and Trieu Tho in the past?" The monk had a very good memory, and he said, "Yes, I remember that story about Vien Anh and Trieu Tho."

"Do you know what Vien An said so that Trieu Tho had to lose his head? Do you know that when that happened, lifetimes ago, you were Vien An and I was Trieu Tho, and that you spoke in such a way that I lost my head. You were Vien An, who made me suffer so many lifetimes, because you did not practice the Fourth Mindfulness Training. You told a lie: you accused me of crimes I had not done, and therefore the king beheaded me.

Then the monk began to shake. It was true—this was the result of what he had done in the past, the cruel things he had done in the past, the fact that he had not practiced the Fourth Mindfulness Training, that he had not spoken the truth. Now he had to bear the result of the action of the past. Then the voice said, "Do you know, after I died, I suffered so much, and I looked for you to try to get revenge, but I couldn't find you because you had regretted, and you became a very good monk, you kept the precepts very well, and you practiced mindful manners. For many years, I could not find any opportunity to get revenge, because you were practicing so well. Therefore, the resentment in me was never washed away. I was very lucky in this lifetime that you were a monk, and the king made you the National Teacher. I was waiting for any opportunity, and then when that feeling of pride came up in you for just a few moments while you were sitting on the Dharma throne, only then could I enter into your body. Do you know who I am? I am your abscess, I am your karma, I am the action you took in the past." When the monk heard that, sweat came out all over his face, and ran down, although it was a cool night.

He had told a lie, he had made another person suffer so much, what could he say now? He did not have the right to say anything—the only thing he could do was to accept his wrongdoing. He bowed his head and he wept. Then he heard the voice coming from the abscess, and it was gentler now, and said: "Luckily you did something good. You helped Master Kaniska, bathing him and looking after him for five years. After that Master Kaniska practiced and realized the path, he became enlightened, and he has great compassion; and for that you are able to come to him. Now, when you wash your abscess with the water, not only will all your suffering end, but my suffering, my resentment will be resolved. So after you've washed your abscess, we won't meet each other again. Now, kneel down and wash your abscess."

When the monk heard that he felt so happy. He knew that after he washed the abscess would all his wrongdoing and suffering be washed away, but the resentment of the other would also be washed away. He breathed in and out mindfully, he knelt down and cupped the water, but his hands were shaking so much that when he dropped the water onto his abscess, he had already lost half of the water. But half of the water was enough for the pain to go. When the water touched the abscess, the pain was so great that it went into his bones, and he fell down in a faint. He was unconscious, then a moment later he came around. He touched his abscess, and he saw it was beginning to go down—it was nearly healed. He took the water twice, three times more, and he had a lot of faith in the healing power of the water, so he stopped shaking because of that. It was still painful, but it was not so painful that he fainted. He waited a little bit, and then he bent down and cupped up another handful of water and poured it on the abscess. Then

he felt so tired that he lay down, and he slept very deeply for a short time.

He slept more peacefully than he had ever slept in his life, and he saw himself as a child of seven years old, running around, playing on the grass, jumping up and down, very happy--a child with two strong legs, running, dancing, jumping, very beautifully in the spring. He saw himself as a child, running like that, and when he was hungry he went back home and saw his mother. His mother was still young, and she put on his clothes and gave him some sweet rice and a cookie and sent him out to play again. He was so happy...in his dream everything was beautiful, everything was easy to bear. Then he heard the sound of a monkey calling out, and it woke him up.

When he woke up, he saw that he was on a mountain, beside a stream, and he remembered that yesterday he had come there, he had climbed the mountain, he had seen the temple, he had met the novice, he had met Master Kaniska, he had been bathed and wiped and given clean clothes and rice soup by the Master, and he had slept. But at midnight he had suffered so much that he had to get up and come down the mountain to the stream. He remembered it all clearly, just as though he was watching a videotape from beginning to end. He looked at the abscess, and it had completely healed. At that point, it was morning light, and the path was clear, and the bank of the stream was clear, and the stone he had leaned against the day before was clear for him to see.

He thought, "I'd better go up the mountain again, to the temple, in order to bow deeply before Master Kaniska who showed me such love and compassion, and helped me to be cured of this abscess which made me suffer for so long." But when he stood up and looked up the mountain for the two pine trees, he couldn't see those two pine trees any more. They had disappeared. Where was the path that he had come down? He couldn't see that any more either. So there was no path for him to go up, and no pine trees, so how in the middle of the night had he been able to come down? Now he couldn't see a single path. Yesterday when he arrived he had seen two pine trees in the mist, and now he couldn't see them any more. Looking again, he saw that his clothes were not new clothes, not the clothes given to him by Master Kaniska, which were fragrant as sandalwood. He was wearing his old clothes, smelling terrible. It seemed that everything had happened in a dream...it was only a dream.

He knew that this was the last time that he would be able to meet Master Kaniska, and that Master Kaniska had made this particular scenery appear magically, so he would be able to cure his sickness. When he looked up, he knew that those two pine trees had been only a magical appearance, the temple up there was a magical appearance, Master Kaniska was only a magic appearance—they all came from his own mind. Not knowing what to do, he stood up and touched the earth nine times in the direction of the mountain, and he thought, "I don't want to return to the capital anymore. I have learned a very important lesson: that my happiness comes from my peace of mind and my inner freedom. My happiness comes from keeping the Five Mindfulness Trainings, from keeping the Ten Mindfulness Trainings, from keeping the Two Hundred and Fifty Trainings of the Bhikshu. Happiness does not come from having ten thousand people bow down before you, from having fame as the National Teacher. I don't want any of those things any more—to be the king's teacher, to have hundreds of people bowing before me, to be revered as the National Teacher, to have a purple Sanghati robe—all these things were not satisfactory."

He wanted one thing: to be liberated and to have inner freedom, to have freedom from desires for fame, for sex, and for possessions. He was determined: he would not return to the capital. He made himself a little hut out of bamboo, and he stayed there to practice on his own. He picked the fruits of the forest, and the leaves of the forest, and made that his food. And when he was hungry, he went down to the Stream of Resolution of Resentment, and he drank that water, and he was no longer hungry. Then he met a woodcutter, and he became his friend. The woodchopper gave him an axe so that they could chop wood together and make a proper hut for him to stay in. That woodcutter became his disciple, and became a novice under him. They both lived together on the mountain, in a little hermitage.

The young novice didn't know anything, and the monk wanted to teach him, so he said, "Ask your mother to go and buy some paper and a pen and I will teach you how to read and write." They loved each other very much, the monk and the novice, and after studying for a period of time, the novice was able to write down the sutras. The novice helped the monk to plant a garden where they could grow vegetables, and they built another little hut so that the novice could stay there and sleep there, and the family of the novice could come and visit him and stay there. The two of them, the master and the novice, lived very happily together on the mountain Cuu Lung. The monk sat down to write a book, and the book was called the *Samadhi on Love and Compassion*. It's more like a chant, it helps us to see, and repent of, and begin anew with the mistakes we have made in the past. It's called the *Meditation on Beginning Anew with Love and Compassion*. Meditation here means concentration. Here it means beginning anew

by means of water. That water is able to wash clean the abscess, and also wash away all the resentment. That book has been translated into Vietnamese. I don't know if it's in English yet. You can find it in the Chinese canon, and it's called the *Water Beginning Anew*. That means Beginning Anew by means of water.

Whenever we have made a mistake, we are determined that we will not make that mistake again. That is called Beginning Anew. Why is it called "Water Beginning Anew?" Because it is like a water that can wash away our suffering and our mistakes of the past, and we have to call that the Water of Love and Compassion: the love of the Buddha, the love of the bodhisattvas, and above all, the love of Master Kaniska. This water of compassion comes from our hearts. This water could be recognized as the water of the stream of Resolving Resentments, which comes

from the Mountain Cuu Lung. This story is a real, true story. It happened one thousand, five hundred years ago, and I have told this story over again in the book called *Stone Boy*. It has been translated into French as "the child of stone." If you want to read it look for the book called *Stone Boy*, or *L'Enfant de Pierre*.

Remember that there are times when we have made mistakes, and we have made others suffer. When this clumsiness of ours, these mistakes of ours, have made others suffer, there always a wound in us, and we have to do something for this wound to be healed. If we want the wound to be healed, the best thing to do is to have a heart of love and compassion, to give rise to a heart of love and compassion, in our own hearts. This is like the stream of water called Resolving Resentment. When there is love, then quite naturally the water of love will flow from our hearts. We take that water, and we wash away our mistakes and the suffering we have caused in the past.

This is a very interesting story; I like it very much. I read it in the sacred texts when I was a novice, and I have written it in modern words so that the children will read it. The subject is that, if in the past we have made others suffer, we have made ourselves suffer, we have to know how to begin anew, how to repent. And the way to begin anew is to allow the water of love and compassion to spring up from our hearts. The love and compassion we give rise to will wash away all the wounds caused by mistakes and wrongdoing in the past.

When you hear the sound of the small bell, if you are a young bamboo, please stand up, bow, and then do walking meditation to go outside.

(Bell)

This word means "internal formation." In Sanskrit it is *samyojana*. It is sometimes translated as "internal knot." My friends, an internal formation is a knot in our hearts, in our minds, a knot of sadness, or a problem in our minds. An internal formation comes about when there is a contact between our eyes and an image, or our ears and a sound. An internal formation is an energy in our mind, and it has the function of making us suffer, and of pushing us to do things that often we don't want to do. For example, if you say something to me that is not very kind, when I hear this unkind word, I have an internal formation, and I am angry with you. If I don't know how to look after my internal formation, it will lie in me for a long time, and I will continue to be angry with you. Only when I can dissolve that internal formation can I love you again.

There are two kinds of internal formations. One is called the pleasant internal formation, and the other is called the painful internal formation. The pleasant internal formations are only pleasant in the beginning, and afterwards they turn out to be unpleasant. For example, we may drink wine or we may use drugs; before we did that we were a free person, and wine or drugs did not imprison us. But once we got in touch with the drugs or wine, we got a pleasant feeling from them. Smoking cigarettes is the same. First this internal formation is very pleasant, we find it something easy for us. And then it becomes a habit, and when we don't have that thing, we cannot bear it. We have to find that thing in order to feel satisfied. In this case we are called "addicted." The internal formation becomes an addiction. Without that thing we cannot bear, we are always thinking about that thing, we are always looking for that thing, we feel we are missing something if we don't have that thing, and therefore we lose our freedom. We see an image, we hear a sound, and it gives us a pleasant internal formation, and we carry that internal formation around with us. When that internal formation is not satisfied by the wine or the drug or the cigarette, we fell ill at ease, and that is what is meant by a pleasant internal formation, and the pleasant internal formation takes away our freedom. The pleasant internal formation is attachment to an object, or craving for an object. These are two internal

formations, attachment and craving. They begin with a pleasant feeling, and later they become toxins, they become demands, which push us day and night, trying to satisfy those demands, and we lose all our freedom.

There are other internal formations which are not pleasant; they are unpleasant right from the start. For example, somebody else does something to us, says something to us, and we become angry, we are upset, we are afraid, we despair, we are jealous—all these things are also internal formations. They are unpleasant internal formations, and they make knots in our hearts and make us suffer. Anger, sadness, anxiety, fear, despair, jealousy—all these things are internal formations, so bitter, they all take away our peace and our freedom. To practice means to do something to transform these internal formations, in order to recover our freedom and our joy. For as long as these internal formations are within us, they will make us suffer, and they will command us to do things, to see things, which will cause harm for ourselves and for others. That is why we sometimes call internal formations "knots which push you to do something." There are internal formations which command us to do and say things which bring about suffering for ourselves and for the other. A practitioner is someone who knows how to recognize the internal formations in her or her own heart, and to transform them.

A husband and wife had just married, and they loved each other so much. One day the husband was welcoming guests, and he was talking to them, chatting, just to make them respect him—it was not the truth. His wife was listening to him, and knew he was not telling the truth. He was exaggerating so that his friends would admire him, and the wife felt very uncomfortable about this: "There's my husband—he's not sincere." She began to have an internal formation of not admiring her husband, because of his insincerity. When that young wife had a feeling that her husband was not sincere, her respect for him was lessened, and despising of him arose. That was an internal

formation.

Does the husband know that she has this internal formation? It's very important that he should know. If both of them, husband and wife, do not know about this internal formation, it's very dangerous. But if the wife knows about it, and the husband practices, she will be determined, once the guests have gone home, to say something to her husband. Of course, she will not say it when the guests are there. Once they have cleared up the glasses, and cleared the table, she will say to her husband: "When you said that, was that the truth, or was that an exaggeration? It wasn't quite the truth, was it? When I heard it, I felt a little ashamed, because my husband was not telling the truth. Please tell me about this, my dear, because I don't want to carry this internal formation around with me. It will make me unhappy."

The wife knows that she already has the beginnings of an internal formation. She doesn't want to keep it for a long time, she wants to resolve it. So she goes to her husband, and she talks like this. Then the husband may think, "My wife has not understood me." And then he will explain, "You misheard me, I was saying this and that." If that is the truth, the internal formation in his wife will dissolve immediately, the wife will again feel her respect for her husband, and the internal formation that we refer to as despising, or lack of respect, will no longer be there. The wife will see that the internal formation has dissolved, and she will feel very happy. She will say, thank goodness you explained it me, otherwise I would have just gone on suffering.

But there may be another instance, when the husband sees that he made a mistake, his wife is right, he was exaggerating, and he can say, "Oh dear, I got carried away. I exaggerated, I praised myself, and I promise, my dear, that I won't do that again." Then the wife can forgive him easily, and she loses her internal formation, and she admires him because he is able to recognize his mistakes. But if he has a skilful way of talking, he is a clever talker, and he really was telling a lie, but he doesn't admit it, then the internal formation will not dissolve. When he makes the same mistake sometime in the future, the first internal formation will grow stronger than it was before. Therefore, clever talking in order to get out of the fact we made a mistake won't help us at all. He might tell his wife, "You know, you misunderstood me, you didn't hear correctly what I said." Or he may say, "Yes, I did tell a lie, I'm very sorry, I won't do it again." That's the way to resolve the internal formation of his wife. But using clever speech, to escape from the wrongdoing he has done, won't help anything. It will lead to his wife looking down on him even more, and in the end, she won't love him any more. When love is no longer there, there will be a lot of despising, and they will leave each other.

(Bell)

We must recognize an internal formation as soon as it is born in our hearts, and we must do all we can to resolve that internal formation, the sooner the better. The longer it is in our hearts, or in another's heart, it will grow. This is called recognizing the internal formation. In our homes, sometimes we have been out, and we come home, and we see water everywhere, and we know that there's something wrong with the plumbing. We have to recognize that there's water everywhere in the house, that there must be a water pipe broken, and we need to take action right away. We turn off the water at the base, and we call the plumber to come and repair the pipe, because we know that if we leave it like that, it will destroy everything in the house. So we have to act right away—turn off the water, call the plumber. This is a kind of internal formation that can happen in our house or our apartment, and we take care of it right away. If we are angry, if we are suspicious or attached or craving, this is an internal formation which takes place in our hearts, and usually we don't look after it straight away. That is a big mistake on the part of many people.

When anger or jealousy or anxiety or fear or craving arises in our hearts, we have to know, "Here is an internal formation." And we have to do something to resolve it, not allowing it to drag on day after day. This is practicing mindfulness. If we know how to practice walking in mindfulness, breathing in mindfulness, working in mindfulness, we are aware of what is happening in the present moment. When we have an internal formation, we will recognize it straight away. When someone else has an internal formation, such as someone close to us, we will also recognize it straight away, and straight away we will begin to manage our internal formation, so that we can help it to transform. For example, this morning I was angry, and when I'm angry I return to my breathing, and I have an opportunity to look at my anger. Just as when I see the water in the house, and I have to go and see where the pipe is broken, I look at my anger and I say, "Where's it coming from?", it could be like this. This anger might have been there before, I might have had a little internal formation in my heart before, but I covered it up with happiness, busyness, and forgot about it, and pretended it wasn't there. But it was still there. Today, the other person said something, and it touched that internal formation, and the energy of anger arose. When we look deep into the energy of anger, we see that this internal formation was already there, it just needed a little sentence to touch it and make it into a very strong area of angry energy. That is like finding out where the pipe is broken.

(Thay draws a diagram on the board.) Here is the internal formation, and here is the person who says something or does something, and it touches the internal formation, and that makes the anger arise. Here is the action, or the words of the other person, touching the internal formation we already have, and that internal formation gives rise to the anger. This area of angry energy will make us suffer. Someone who doesn't practice, who just lets things carry on like this, and puts up with it and doesn't do anything about it, having become angry, this person will do or say things which are very unkind, in order to

make the other person suffer. And then that person will make us say or do things that will touch our internal formations again, and then we will get angry again, even more angry than the first time, and this bigger anger will also make us say more foolish and clumsy things than before. Those more unkind things will make the other person say more unkind things back to us, and the escalation of suffering will continue. Every day the internal formation will become bigger and bigger. How are we going to resolve this?

When the internal formation has been touched and appears as the energy of anger, someone who practices mindfulness will return to himself or herself, and will say to himself or herself, "I am angry. There is anger in me." We have to acknowledge that anger is in us. We look deeply into it, and practice breathing mindfully, and we see where this anger comes from. Where does this anger come from? First of all, we can say that it comes from the words or the actions of the other person. Usually, when we are angry, we suffer. We think that the thing which is responsible for our anger and our suffering is the other person. We very rarely think that we ourselves are responsible for making this anger and suffering within ourselves.

When we practice the second stage, looking deeply to see where our anger comes from, we may find many causes and conditions. The first cause and condition is that the other person has their own suffering, and they do not know how to manage and look after their own suffering, so they have to find ways to lessen their suffering, and so they think, "If I punish the other person who made me suffer, I will suffer less." When we suffer, and we don't know how to look after and transform our suffering, we want to punish the person we think is the cause of our suffering. It

means that we allow our suffering to pour out on the people around us. At first, we may think that the other person is intentionally making us suffer, but in fact, if we look deeply, we will see that that person is suffering a lot, and doesn't know what to do about it, and therefore foolishly says and does things that make us suffer. Their aim, in saying and doing these things, is not to hurt us, but to get some relief from their own suffering. If we can see that, then we have already done very well, and we will suffer much less. The other person may not want to say that, may not want to do that, but because their suffering is so great, and they don't know how to look after and transform their suffering, their suffering just pushes them along. Suffering is like an internal formation, so that they do something and they say something which touches our internal formation. Then we suffer and we get angry—we are doing just as the other person does. We are both getting angry and suffering together.

We might find another reason for our anger, which generally we don't think about. The other person may not want to make us suffer. They are saying something quite different from what we think, they are doing something that has nothing to do with us, but because we have a wrong perception, we think that the other person is the cause of our suffering. In fact, the suffering, the anger which arises here, is wholly dependent on the wrong perception.

We have heard the story about someone who was rowing a boat along a stream in the mist. He was making a lot of effort because he was rowing against the stream, and then he saw another boat coming downstream towards him. Instead of moving out of his way, the boat seemed to be coming straight for him. He shouted out, "Take care! Take care! Get out of the way!" And with all his strength he tries to get out of the way, but the boat continues coming towards him. His boat capsizes, and the other boat capsizes, and the person who had been rowing becomes very angry, and he says, "I will get even with the person rowing the other boat." But when he gets out onto the shore, he sees that there is no one else. The other boat didn't have anybody in it.

We think that the other person had somebody in them, and that they were coming straight towards us, and we get angry with them for that. If we knew that that boat didn't have anybody in it, we wouldn't have gotten angry. In many cases, because of our wrong perceptions, we suffer. When we suffer, we put the blame on somebody else, just as in the story of the woman called Nam Xuong. She was pregnant, but her husband had to go into the army. When he came back from the army, the child was already three years old. This was the first time that he had seen his child. He asked his wife to go to the market and buy offerings for the ancestral altar. While his wife was out, he said to the little boy, "Why don't you call me Daddy?" The little boy said, "You're not my daddy. My daddy comes every night and sometimes my mommy cries with my daddy, and often my mother talks to my daddy a whole hour. When my mommy sits down, my daddy sits down, and when my mommy lies down, my daddy lies down."

When the husband heard this he thought that his wife had been unfaithful, and when she came back from the market he didn't want to look at her. When everything was prepared on the altar to the ancestors, he touched the earth before the ancestors, but he didn't allow his wife to touch the earth in front of the ancestors, because he thought that if she had been unfaithful to him, she has betrayed the ancestors, and therefore she should not prostrate in front of them. And his wife suffered a great deal. Why did her husband not look at her? Why did her husband not allow her to prostrate? Why did he roll up the mat and not allow her to prostrate? Why didn't he stay to have the celebration meal after coming home? Why did he go to the wine bar and get drunk, and come back at three o'clock? And why did he get up in the early morning and go out and get drunk again? His wife suffered so much that she could not stand it any more, and so she went and jumped into the river and killed herself.

When the husband heard that his wife had died, he came home to look after the little boy, and that night, when he lit the lamp, the child shouted out: "Mister, Mister, Daddy's come—here he is!" And the boy pointed to the shadow of his father on the wall. Then he understood that every night while he was away in the army, his wife would light the lamp, and she would talk to her husband on the wall. She would say "Your husband comes home. Your husband comes

lamp, and she would talk to her shadow on the wall. She would say, "You've been away so long. You've been away many years. How can I bring our child up on my own?" And she would cry. The reason she had done this was that one day the child had come home and said: "Where's my daddy? Other children have daddies—where's my daddy?" His mother had pointed to the shadow on the wall and said, "Look, that's your daddy. You can talk to him, if you like." Therefore, when the husband came home, and the child said, "My father comes every night, my mother talks to my father every night, when my mother sits down, my father sits down," that was the truth, the truth of a child. But the husband had a wrong perception, and he had a big suspicion of his wife, thinking she was unfaithful, and he had an internal formation, and he couldn't transform that internal formation.

Out of his suffering he made his wife suffer too, because he did not talk to her. Therefore, his wife, being treated in this terrible way, couldn't do anything but kill herself. If the wife had known what she was doing, she would have come to her husband and said, "My dear, it's so strange. You were so happy when you first came home, but when I came home from the market you had changed completely—you wouldn't look at me, you wouldn't talk to me. What have I done to cause you to be like this?" If she had said that, then the husband would have explained. He would have said, "Our child says that a man comes every night, and you weep with him, you talk to him, and when he sits down, you sit down, when he lies down, you lie down. Tell me, what's this about? If he had said that, then his wife would have had an opportunity to explain, but he had such a great arrogance and pride, such self-pride. He had two internal formations, the internal formation of suspicion, and the internal formation of pride.

It was not only the fault of the husband, it was not only the fault of the wife, it was the fault of both of them that they suffered so much. The husband thought my wife is unfaithful, she is not worthy of the ancestors. He did not know that he should not believe in his perception. Why did he not go to the wife and ask her directly, "My dear, when you went to the market I was talking to our child, and he said that someone comes every night, and that you make the child call that man 'Father.' If you can't explain this I don't want to live." And then she would have had an opportunity to explain, and husband and wife could have been happy again. We all have pride. We all suffer. Both of them had pride, and because of their pride, they could not resolve the internal formations, and the tragedy happened. So wrong perception plays a very important role in bringing about suffering between two people. It makes the communication between two people come to an end. When we suffer, when we're angry, we have to have the capacity to ask, is my perception wrong or not? We should always ask ourselves: "Is my perception correct?"

Today we have heard the story of a man and wife who had just married, and the husband told a lie, and made the wife give rise to an internal formation, when she saw her husband as one who does not tell the truth, and she ceased to respect him as her husband. But in such a situation, we cannot be sure that what we heard was correct. We have to go to our husband and say: "This morning when the guests came did you really say that? Did I hear that right? Please explain it to me." The young wife, if she does this, does not have confidence in her own perception. She has to ask her husband to know the truth, and the young husband is not proud. When we love each other, we have to have faith in each other—trust—and when we have some suffering, we must go to the other and ask for help. If we allow our pride to stand between us, how can there be communication?

In the future, when husband is angry with wife, or wife is angry with husband, if we have a large amount of suffering, and we think that our suffering comes from the other, please don't do what this wife did. Go to your wife or husband and say, "I am suffering, I don't understand why you said that, I don't know why you did that. So please, I'm asking you, explain to me so that I can understand." If a husband is proud, and doesn't go to his wife and ask her to explain, he may be the victim of a wrong perception and that wrong perception will make him suffer all his life. The same is true of the wife. If the wife is suffering, if she is angry, and if she thinks that she is sure that her husband is the cause of her anger and her suffering, then she should also not allow her pride to stand between them. She should go to her husband and she should say, "My dear, I am suffering. I don't understand why you said that. I don't understand why you did that to me. Do I deserve to be treated like that? Please explain it to me." We should say this with all our sincerity, expressing the truth of our feelings, and then the other will see their responsibility, and explain to us that we have a wrong perception, or that in a moment of forgetfulness or affliction they have said this, and they will admit it and then say, "I will do my best never to do that again." Therefore, the suffering will be resolved, and the internal formation will come to an end.

In a relationship between two people, there will obviously be difficulties. We cannot avoid it. When the other makes an internal formation in us, we suffer, and we blame the other. But when we make the other suffer, we may not know that we have made the other suffer, or that we are making the other suffer. All we can see is the actions and the words of the other, which make us suffer, and we cannot see our own actions and words that make the other suffer. That is the truth—it's always like that, we are all like that. When the other makes us suffer, we know it. We know that that action, those words made us suffer. Because we are clumsy, lacking mindfulness, we will have made the other suffer without knowing it. Therefore, the best way to act is to sit down together frequently, to have tea

together, or just sit together, and ask the other, "These past days, have I, out of forgetfulness or clumsiness, done something to make you suffer?" This is important. This is what we call "Beginning Anew" in Plum Village. If possible, we should practice this every week. Even if nothing has happened, even if there is no friction in our family, we should still, at least once, sit down together, and when we are sitting together we can practice watering flowers, help each other to see clearly, and shine light on each other's behavior. First of all, we practice watering the flower.

Watering the flower means that we sit with the other, we recognize the positive things about the other person, and we mention them. If the other person is fresh, is patient, is tolerant, has talents and skills, we have to say, "I'm so happy when I see these qualities in you." That is called watering the flowers. Watering the flowers is like giving a present, bringing happiness to the person you love very quickly. The person you love is a flower. That flower can give us freshness, and happiness, and when we have a flower, we have to look after it, water it. Whatever positive qualities this person has, we should recognize them and mention them.

Once in the Lower Hamlet, we had organized the Buddha's Birthday, and there was a husband and wife who had come from Bordeaux to be present at the ceremony, and I remember that I talked about watering the flowers during that ceremony. During the teaching, I saw the wife listening to me and crying. I thought she was suffering, and after the teaching I went to her husband, and I said, "Maybe you haven't remembered to water your flower recently." I just said that, and he woke up when he heard it. After the afternoon meal they left for Bordeaux, and while he was driving he watered the flower of his wife. It only takes an hour and a half to go to Bordeaux. When they got home, the wife had become a different person, very fresh, very happy, very lovable, because her husband had watered the flower of his lifelong friend. Before that he didn't know how to water flowers...well, he must have known how to water flowers before that, but he never did it. I had to tell him to do it, and then he did it. So coming to Plum Village has its points sometimes.

If you live with your lifelong friend, if you're living with your father or your mother, or your children, or your brother or your sister, you must remember to water the flowers. Everybody has some positive qualities if we can recognize them, and if we can mention them, if we can offer them to that person, then that person will have happiness very quickly. Therefore the practice of watering flowers is a wonderful practice. If necessary, we have to do it again and again, we have to repeat the qualities of that person, because they are true. That person really does have the spirit of self-sacrifice, that person really does have patience, etcetera. We have to say that, she is someone who is humble, she is someone who knows how to smile in difficult moments, and if necessary we have to repeat these qualities. When it's sunny and hot, we have to water the flowers every day, we don't just do it once and think that that's enough. Our duty is to water the flowers of those we live with.

After we have finished watering flowers, we should look deeply and shine light on each other's behavior. We ask the other person, "Please shine light on me, show me where I'm clumsy, where I make mistakes." This practice can be called "guidance offering." It means that we say sincerely to the person that we love: "I know that I have weaknesses. I am often forgetful, and I may have said and done things which have made you suffer. Please, tell me, what have I done? If you tell me, I will not repeat these clumsinesses in the future."

In Plum Village, the monks and nuns and the lay people all do this practice of offering guidance. From time to time we have to join our palms and say, "Please, offer guidance to me. In these past weeks, have I said or done anything to make my brothers and my sisters suffer? Can I do something better? What can I do to make my brothers and sisters happier? When we join our palms with all our sincerity, and ask like this, our brothers and sisters will be compassionate and they will show us. We will learn a great deal with this sincere request, and in the future we will not continue to do or say the things which have brought about suffering. This is called the method of offering guidance. If you live as a couple, or you live in a family of three or four, you can use this method of offering guidance in your family. We have so busy, but we are not so busy that we do not have time to sit down and drink tea together, and practice watering the flowers for each other, and asking each other, "My dear, during the last week have I done or said anything to make you suffer? I really need to know. If you really love me, you will tell me."

If we practice once a week like this, the relationship between us will never get difficult, and in fact will grow more beautiful every day. The relationship between us is the foundation of our happiness. If our relationship, our communication, is not good, if we cut off the communication, then our relationship will deteriorate from day to day, and the internal formations in us will grow greater every day, and then the time will come when we cannot look at each other any more.

When you have suffering, you don't just sit there and bear it, and let it overwhelm you. You have to recognize it, and seek its source. Where does it come from? You can ask your lifelong friend, your dear one, whether it's your father, mother, child, brother or sister, to help us to look deeply and find the reason for our suffering. We are not holy ones, we are not perfect. We are still ordinary people living in the world. We have our suffering, so we have to see that we have the right to suffer, but we shouldn't keep suffering day after day after day. We have to practice to transform our suffering. I often say we have the right to suffer, but we do not have the right not to practice, because we are the students of the Buddha, we are students of Thay, we are part of the Sangha, and when we suffer we should not just sit there and bear it, we have to practice. We have the right to suffer, but we have to look into the content of our suffering in order to discover why that suffering has come. You can suffer, but you cannot not practice. You have to practice - practice by breathing, by walking, by looking into your internal formation and discovering its cause. By going to the other person, and asking the other person to support us. If we do not go to the other person, if we are not able to talk to the other person, and do not practice looking deeply together to discover the origin of our suffering, and find the way to get out of our suffering, then we are not good practitioners. In that case, we may try to find a way to get out of our environment, and think about divorcing. We think about leaving this place and going to live somewhere else: but with this internal formation what is the point? We will just continue to

place and going to live somewhere else, but with this internal formation, what is the point. We will just continue to suffer, even if we divorce. We could change husbands or wives, but our internal formation would still be there. If we cannot transform our internal formation, we will continue to say and do things which make others suffer, and in our new wife or new husband we will make new internal formations, and the cycle of Samsara will continue. So the question is not should I divorce or not, the question is do I practice or do I not practice? We have to practice with our lifelong friend, and practice with the environment that we are given.

If we think that this environment is not a good environment, that only when I get out of this environment will I stop suffering, you are making a mistake. Wherever you go you will meet human beings, and human beings are always clumsy and lack mindfulness. Therefore the best thing to do is to stay where you are, practice where you are. And the method of practice which has been offered to us--to use the energy of mindfulness in order to embrace our suffering, to look deeply into our suffering, to find out what are the causes, far and near, of our suffering, to practice together with others, and to practice on our own--this has been offered to us, and only that will transform the internal formation in us. When we have transformed the internal formation, we will become a free person. A free person is not politically free; this free person is free of their afflictions, such as attachment, craving, greed, anger, fear, and jealousy. Only when we can help each other to transform our internal formations will we have freedom, freedom from the afflictions. Happiness can only be present when we are free. Therefore, to recognize the internal formations which are in us, in order to transform them, in order to arrive at freedom, that is our practice. The Buddha has shown us very practical ways to do this. Please remember that although you are very intelligent, although you have a lot of knowledge about the Buddha-dharma, if you do not practice the basic practices, such as going on walking meditation, breathing mindfully, eating in mindfulness, working in mindfulness, practicing watering flowers, practicing beginning anew, you will not be able to transform your suffering, which appears in the form of internal formations.

(Three bells)

(End of Dharma talk)

Source : <http://www.plumvillage.org>